

AP STYLE: GENERAL RULES

WHAT IS IT?

Associated Press (AP) style is used by most newspapers, magazines, and public relations departments in the United States and serves as the standard for writing in journalism. AP style prioritizes consistency, clarity, accuracy, and brevity and avoids stereotyping subjects and using offensive language. The Associated Press Stylebook provides an alphabetized list of over 5,000 guidelines for journalistic writing; although most AP rules are easily referenced, five key areas require specialized knowledge: abbreviations, capitalization, punctuation, numerals, and titles.

ABBREVIATIONS

AP specifies rules for abbreviations:

- Do not abbreviate distances and dimensions (inch or mile except for “mph”).
- Generally abbreviate titles when used before a name (Gov. Hardy or Rev. Joyce). However some titles are not abbreviated (Mayor, professor).
- Abbreviate company, corporation, incorporated, and limited when used after the name of a corporate entity (Stein Co., Ellison Corp. Frost Inc. Orwell Ltd.).
- Abbreviate dates and numerals to ensure clarity (No. 4, Dec. 8. Months are abbreviated only when accompanied by a specific day).
- Do not abbreviate the days of the week unless necessary for a table.
- Abbreviate avenue, boulevard, and street only when they are part of a numbered address (267 Oakland St., 2132 Aspen Blvd., 1045 Laurel Ave.). Drive, Circle, Road, and alley are never abbreviated.
- DO NOT put abbreviations and acronyms in parentheses after the first full usage of the full title or name (The Society of Lawn Care said that... NOT The Society of Lawn Care (SLC) said that...).
- DO NOT put abbreviations and acronyms in headlines (although sometimes this is unavoidable because of the length of some state names).

PUNCTUATION

AP style follows most punctuation rules, but the following exceptions are notable:

- Punctuation goes inside the quotation marks in direct quotations (She said, “I bought every AP Style book.” Her collection includes...).
- Do not place a comma before the conjunction with items in a series (He planted beets, peas and carrots.).
- Semicolons are used to clarify sentences with multiple commas (The big, red horse; small, tabby cat; and fluffy, bouncy dog were adopted.).
- Use hyphens for compound adjectives except with words that end in -ly or very (cat-collecting system vs. very effective system).

CAPITALIZATION

AP style follows down style capitalization (only the first word of a title and proper nouns are capitalized), but always refer to the style guide and doublecheck capitalization recommendations. AP follows two broad rules for capitalization:

- Common names are not capitalized unless part of a proper name (the river vs. the Thames River).
- DO NOT capitalize plural words even when part of a proper name (e.g. Sixth and Seventh streets).

TITLES

AP style follows specific guidelines for titles:

- Capitalize titles when they appear before a person's name (Sen. Nunn, vs. Sam Nunn, former Georgia senator). AP does not capitalize or abbreviate "professor" before a name.
- Place titles of books, movies, operas, poems, songs, works of art, and video games in quotation marks. Do not put quotation marks around websites and titles of journals, holy books, and magazines (e.g. "To Kill a Mockingbird" vs. Time magazine).
- Don't use courtesy titles (Mr., Mrs., Miss, and Ms.) except in direct quotations or at the person's request.

NUMERALS

Write out numbers under ten; otherwise, use numbers except in the following scenarios:

- ages (9 years old, 9-year-old)
- addresses (2735 Forest Rd.)
- dimensions (4 by 4' planks)—feet and inches should be spelled out.
- money (6 cents, 45 dollars) Amounts under \$1 use the numeral and the word cents; amounts over a dollar use the number with the dollar sign: \$45
- dates (May 4)
- highways (Highway 575)
- millions (5 million to 7 million)
- percentages (8%)
- temperature (90 degrees Fahrenheit)
- time (6:50 a.m.)
- Plural numbers are written by adding -s without an apostrophe. (7s, 11s)
- Never begin sentences with numbers unless the sentence starts with the year. (2019 was a great year.)

FURTHER RESOURCES

Always consult the official Associated Press Stylebook for other AP questions and guidelines. The KSU Writing Center has current AP books available for use, as well as Writing Assistants to help you with AP format.